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ABSTRACT

Re:Learning, a major national effort to redesign the total school system, is grounded in the belief that school renewal efforts must focus on schooling's primary purpose--to help all students learn to use their minds well. In July and August 1989, 13 focus groups were convened in Colorado for the Education Commission of the States' Re:Learning effort. The focus groups, comprised of 3 to 12 people from various interest groups living in the Denver area, met to discuss: (1) how people react to terms used in Re:Learning and other school reform efforts; (2) barriers to effective learning and improved education for children; (3) how and by whom these barriers can be overcome; and (4) how responsible parties might be motivated to improve education. Aside from the findings described in this report for each topic, three important perspectives permeated the discussions: each group felt somewhat isolated or even excluded from the education loop; each group felt a sense of powerlessness; and the groups did not clearly see how their possible actions fit together with those of others. The focus group led to three major conclusions: educational change cannot occur without widespread cooperation; extensive and effective communications are essential; and the group process is a valuable way to inform people about Re:Learning. Three appendices explain Re:Learning, detail focus group activities, and list participants. (MLH)

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FOCUSING ON RE:LEARNING

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FOCUSING ON RE:LEARNING

In July and August 1989, 13 focus groups were convened in Colorado for the Education Commission of the States' Re:Learning effort[1]. They looked at:

- How various groups of people react to terms used in Re:Learning and other school reform efforts
- What members of these groups see as barriers to effective active learning and improved education for children
- How members of these groups think these barriers can be overcome and who they believe should take responsibility for overcoming them
- Whom members of these groups think could motivate them to become involved in Re:Learning or other school reform efforts to improve education for children.

The 13 focus groups consisted of three to 12 people from each of the following special interests (listed in order of time convened): business, Hispanics, African Americans, school board members, school administrators, teachers, Native Americans, small-town and rural citizens, students, state legislators, gubernatorial-legislative-education organization staff, parents and media. Participants were from the metropolitan Denver, Colorado, area with the exception of the small town/rural group that consisted of participants from the Fort Morgan, Colorado, community. Each group met for one hour with a group leader familiar with Re:Learning. The list of questions discussed and the list of participants for each group are included in Appendices B and C respectively.

REACTION TO TERMS

To better understand how people from different backgrounds interpret terms used in Re:Learning and other school reform efforts, the participants in each of the focus groups were asked to respond to the following terms:

- Student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach
- So students can learn to use their minds well
- At-risk youth
- System change
- Shared responsibility in learning
- Re:Learning

It was interesting that the participants in all of the focus groups had a positive reaction to the term "shared responsibility" and a negative reaction to the term "at-risk youth." Their reactions were not as uniform on the other four terms. Participants in all but two of the

[1] Re:Learning is a strategy to change policies, philosophies and practices at points throughout the education system from schoolhouse to statehouse so all students learn to use their minds well. Appendix A provides more detail.

groups generally had positive reactions to the phrase "so students can learn to use their minds well." However, both the black and student groups had strong negative reactions to this phrase.

On the other hand, participants in all but three of the groups generally had negative reactions to the term "system change," although a school board member, state legislator and parent had positive reactions. Participants in almost all of the groups split opinions on the terms "student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach" and "Re:Learning." Almost every group had participants who had positive reactions to these terms and participants who had negative reactions.

Student-as-Worker and Teacher-as-Coach

Positive reactions to this phrase included the following comments: teacher as facilitator instead of a single expert; student actively engaged in the learning process instead of passive; teacher is assisting in learning; a team process; student is applying what he/she is learning; student accepts responsibility; learning is child centered; coach is more nurturing and helpful; students teaching students; coaching provides consistent and regular feedback; teacher is more engaged in mentoring relationship; contract between student and coach with rewards; individualized, student focus instead of teacher focus; efficient way to do things; interactive process; two-way street.

Although there were many positive responses to the phrase "student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach," at least one person in each group had a negative reaction to either the term "worker" or the term "coach" or both. A **teacher** objected to this phrase on the basis that a teacher also is working and learning. A **small town/rural** participant cautioned that the phrase could be negative if it meant concentrating on the job instead of on learning. A **student** interpreted the phrase as suggesting rigid roles and questioned whether or not the roles ought to be reversed at times. Some of the **parents** thought that the phrase suggested dictatorship, could set up a "we/they" syndrome and ignored the role of parents. And some **legislators** saw the phrase as too simplistic or managed and structured.

A **school board member, Native American** and **staff** participant all felt strongly about replacing the term "worker" with "team" or "learner." Other **staff** participants believed that the teacher also should be a worker and that "worker" sounds like an assembly line. A **media** person suggested that "worker" is not a very humanistic term.

The **media** representative also saw "coach" as a confining sports term. A **school administrator** suggested that some teachers might resist "teacher-as-coach," and a **teacher** confirmed this by noting that coaching of athletics is not democratic, but very authoritarian.

So Students Can Learn To Use Their Minds Well

Participants in all but two of the groups had positive reactions to this phrase, describing it as: the end product of education, applying knowledge to new situations, higher-level thinking skills vs. rote-learning skills, engaged in critical thinking, problem solving, learning to learn, ongoing process, practical learning for life skills, stimulated and

challenged, kids have different ways of learning, fostering creativity, high expectations and high potential.

On the other hand, the **students** questioned what "well" meant, saying "well" for one is not "well" for another. The **black** participants felt strongly that this is a problem phrase, noting that kids already are using their minds. They suggested that "develop" or "enhance" might be better terms.

At-Risk Youth

Participants in all of the groups agreed that the phrase "at-risk youth" has negative connotations which include: potential dropouts, unmotivated, disenfranchised students, someone else's problem, dysfunctional families, students who are cultural or linguistic minorities, a community problem, kids with special needs that are not addressed, major problem facing education today but inadequately addressed, disadvantaged students, minorities, poor people, children who have problems adjusting to structured schools, slipping through the cracks, those who are geared to fail.

Several of the participants in different groups warned about the dangers of labeling or pre-judging youth, noting that stereotyping impedes the educational process. Some **school board members, school administrators, teachers, staff** and **parents** said that all kids are "at risk" at some point. But a **Native American** said this was an Anglo term that did not apply to Native Americans.

System Change

Participants in almost all of the groups noted that the phrase "system change" has negative connotations which suggest a huge undertaking that will meet some resistance because "a lot of those in the system have done very well in it"; it will "upset the apple cart"; it implies a change that will be "forced down teachers' throats" or cause "financial disaster." However, a **school board member**, a **state legislator** and a **parent** related "system change" to site-based management with a positive impact. A **school administrator** cautioned that a distinction needs to be made between school reform (doing some things better) and system change (design changes).

Shared Responsibility in Learning

The universal response to "shared responsibility" was that "all of us," as one **parent** said, are responsible for the improvement of education -- parents, community, administrators, teachers and students. A **school board member** observed that "learning goes beyond the classroom." A **school administrator** noted that it "doesn't stop at the schoolhouse door." **Native Americans** argued that community leaders and industry leaders should both assume some responsibility and that there must be "shared vision between schools, parents and the Native American community." A **state legislator** believed that both business and organized labor ought to be involved and a **teacher** felt that all should share responsibility for high-risk students.

Re:Learning

There were two distinct messages communicated by the term "Re:Learning" -- one negative and one positive. On the negative side, the message was: remedial or not sure what it means (**school board members**), business now spending millions reteaching what people should learn in high school (**teacher**), too much attention to basic training and credentials (**small town/rural**), back to basics (**student**), guaranteed graduates (**legislator**), spending the first few months redoing and reviewing what happened last year (**staff**), learning over (**parent**), didn't comprehend the first time -- do it over again (**media**). A **media** person emphasized that the term is confusing and "doesn't make much sense when you hear it ... doesn't get the message across to me."

Native Americans noted that the schools do not validate the experience of Indian people and that "America has to do some relearning about American Indians." A **school administrator** said that "we all will have to do relearning to keep up with changes in society, including services and technology."

The positive messages communicated by "Re:Learning" were: life-long learning or everything regarding learning (**school board members, parents** and **staff**), flexibility and open-mindedness (**school administrator**), evolutionary process (**teacher**), rethinking, adults who have graduated still need to learn (**small town/rural**), relearning at deeper level of understanding (**student**), purpose of education and it can be fun (**legislators**).

BARRIERS TO ACTIVE LEARNING

There was consistent support throughout the 13 groups for an increased percentage of classroom time devoted to effective active learning. The general understanding was that this type of learning meant non-lecture, hands-on activities where students could learn from one another.

Tradition was the most common barrier to effective active learning identified by most of the focus groups, including business participants, school board members, school administrators, teachers, small town/rural participants, students, staff and media participants. A **business** participant called it a "traditional culture that doesn't promote moving to the front of the boat," a culture that says that "the teacher is always right." **School board members** said traditional schools are hard to change, and a **school administrator** pointed out that "people are slow to change" and the "system is not set up to make changes." Another **school administrator**, a **teacher** and a **rural** participant pointed out that "we teach the way we are taught," parents and teachers all experienced the same "traditional system." And a **media** person lamented that Americans are "too tied to our grandparents' era."

Other than tradition, there was a significant difference in the barriers to effective active learning identified by the different focus groups. A **business** participant saw "high expectations" as a barrier while a **black** participant identified "low expectations" as the barrier. **Blacks, Native Americans** and **Hispanics** identified racism or stereotyping as a barrier.

The **business** participants listed the following additional barriers: no appropriate role models, teachers' fear of losing discipline, lack of student self-esteem, lack of learning values, drugs, size of classrooms and distance. **Blacks** identified additional barriers as: early messages students get from tracking, biased tests, teaching to a test, attitudes, self-centered instructors, lack of society's commitment to educating all kids -- "keep some stupid" -- and policy makers not relating to developing kids as whole people. **Hispanics** saw additional barriers as: overcrowded curriculum, legal constraints in the form of lawsuits against the education system, restrictions from school board members, parents who hold the schools in "awe," lack of resources, teaching degree requirements, teacher training and preparation, old facilities, lack of incentives and the grading system.

Additional barriers identified by **school board members** included: not enough time, school set up for rote learning, limited in-service training for teachers, a lot more work required on teachers' parts and pressure from society has become mundane. **School administrators** added the following barriers: modeling is not being done -- school boards and superintendents have to provide models for decision making -- the fear of failure is immobilizing and the present structure has the appearance of serving some students whose families are empowered in the system. **Teachers** saw barriers as: fear on the part of teachers to bring up testing scores, questions about how one measures active learning, teachers threatened by lack of control, lack of teacher preparation for change, lack of resources, high noise levels and the difficulty of selling this concept to parents and students. One **teacher** noted that, "In college, I never had a professor who mirrored good pedagogical techniques."

In discussing barriers to active learning, the **Native American** participants pointed out that the curriculum must be reformed to teach the truth about American history and how America was founded. But, as one said, "you can't do curriculum reform with one hour of planning time or two weeks in the summer." They argued that Indian kids fail to learn in schools because they have no role models and no agenda to include Indians in the curriculum because they lack power. Indian kids feel "what's the use of getting an education when I can't get a job" because they see Native Americans applying for professional positions "at the bottom of the pile." They noted that it was unusual for Native Americans to be hired for high-paying jobs.

The **small town/rural** participants said barriers to active learning were: apathy, limited budget, schools operating as a factory system and the state legislature only focusing on a change in the process instead of saying, "Here's the level we want students to perform at; you figure out how to do it." Barriers identified by **students** included: lack of money and committed teachers, suppressing curiosity, making everyone average and special difficulties on commuter campuses. **State legislators** felt barriers included: media difficulties, not being able to teach well, test scores indicating that the schools are not working for minorities and only 50% of the kids having their needs met by the schools. One **legislator** commented on a student newspaper being censored by the principal and argued that the "values of democracy need to be passed on" because "democracy is at risk." The **gubernatorial, legislative** and **education organization staff** participants saw such barriers as: fear of change, risk that what works in one place may not work in another, people not caring "as long as test scores are okay and taxes don't go up" and parents reacting but not getting involved.

Parents listed the following as barriers: teacher creativity being stifled, everyone feeling defensive because of fear of lawsuits and social pressures; teachers trained to teach subjects and not kids; too many students and too little time; parents placing too much emphasis on grades instead of learning; businesses not supporting parents and modeling the importance of education; parents being intimidated by school personnel; and school districts saying, "Don't question our judgments, we know what's best for your kid . . . if you question it, you are disloyal." The **media** participants said that the barriers to change included: the "perception that you can't fight city hall"; parents who are not interested and "don't care what is going on the schools"; teachers who are not creative; and school bureaucracies that keep dampening enthusiasm.

SOLUTIONS

Each of the focus groups spent considerable time discussing how the barriers identified could be overcome and what different individuals or groups could do to remove the barriers.

The **business** participants suggested that they could help by serving as mentors and role models to provide more relevance for what the kids are learning in school. They also suggested that business could help by providing exchange programs, letting kids shadow business people, sharing their expertise on restructuring and supporting parents who are their employees by allowing time off from work for school-related needs. Other groups that the **business** participants suggested could help were **state legislators** who "ought to provide more revenues for education," **teachers** who need to see themselves as facilitators and have site-based management and the **media** that needs to be better utilized. They suggested that a media person be recruited to initiate a concerted media campaign to market education with slogans, bumper stickers, rock stars on TV, magazine articles, articles in the Wall Street Journal and more TV programs highlighting youth success stories like the program "Keys to Success." **Media** personalities also could help by focusing on academics as much as sports, illustrating education as "glamorous" or "sexy," raising consciousness about educational needs in the year 2000 and highlighting the personal satisfaction received from education and literature.

The **business** participants further suggested that a "year-round" education program with more minority role models is needed.

Hispanics felt they could each help overcome the barriers by becoming more involved in education at all levels by attending school board meetings, recruiting Hispanic candidates for the school board and encouraging more Hispanics to become teachers. They suggested that the **federal** government "put more money into education and quit building bombs"; that **principals** open school libraries, cafeterias and classrooms to parents, and use **parents** as volunteers in the schools up to 20 hours per week; and that collaboration be increased between **private industry** and **university deans of education.** In addition, they suggested that the **media** establish education as a priority across the country; balance the number of reporters covering education with coverage in other areas like city hall, the legislature and police activities; build on the United Negro College Fund theme that "the mind is a terrible thing to waste"; highlight positive stories about youth instead of the dropout and suicide rates; ask the producers and writers of sit-coms or soap operas to focus on school reform as part of their storyline in one week of episodes; and appeal to self-interest by showing

how taxes will be higher in 1995 if education is not improved, but will be lower with improvements in education.

Hispanics also saw a need to make better use of cable companies, learn from the success of military recruiting manuals to reach youth at the lower levels and encourage organizations to incorporate school reform ideas in their pamphlets.

To overcome barriers, the **black** participants suggested that everyone begin to "build trust with each other" and "develop respect for one another despite class status." They pointed out that the schools need to deal with the issue of self-esteem and understand that many are on a "fragile" level. **Students** should be asked for their input and ought to be exposed to different things. Ways need to be devised for the "problem makers" to be seen as "problem solvers." An environment that encourages learning needs to be developed along with curriculum that meets individual student needs. Emphasis should be placed on parents visiting schools. Perhaps **parents** should be asked to sign a pact with the school or teacher. Other suggestions were that education policy makers, specifically superintendents, stop demanding tests as the only tool to assess student progress. Additional ideas included team teaching, using guest lecturers as role models and utilizing **business** expertise on how to motivate.

The **school board members** recognized that they need to exercise leadership to look at change to overcome the barriers identified, separate "what is important from what is not" and motivate community people to "adopt shared goals." They agreed that they need to look at "broad goals" and not "personal agendas" and develop clear goals and then "let teachers do their thing . . . give them a say in their future . . . encourage creativity but be specific about what they want to accomplish." Individual school board members need to "model behavior" and treat people before them with respect. It was pointed out that school boards "need to take risks" because of the "challenging times" and that the primary challenge is "for us to use our own heads."

School boards also need to support community forums with lively discussions, involve racial minorities in a meaningful way, create an environment where teachers can take risks, ask questions to which they don't know the answers, allow principals to take leadership in cutting their own budgets and "when things go wrong, work with their people to go beyond their mistakes." Partnerships need to be established to facilitate change and successes need to be celebrated. As one school board member said, "Being a school board member is like playing golf: it's a struggle, but every now and then one success makes you keep going!" Finally, the school board members pointed out that "our education **President** and **legislature** need to provide more support." The **federal government** and **state legislature** need to say, "What can we do to help support you?" **State legislatures** need to amend school finance acts to provide new money for new activities. The **business** community needs to "tie into the schools," and the **general community**, including churches, needs to become more involved and honor kids for "intellectual activity" like the Vietnamese community has done.

In order to overcome barriers, "risk needs to be more than tolerated; it has to be encouraged," according to the **school administrators**. Additional suggestions to overcome barriers included: getting rid of bells, throwing away schedules, abolishing tracking in departments, abolishing grading and modifying Carnegie units, looking at how student progress is evaluated, abolishing testing except as a measure of growth, instituting site-

based management, raising aspiration levels, supporting reforms one school or classroom at a time, encouraging teachers to become mentors for students and having students provide services to both the school and community for credit. One administrator said, "I would like to interact with the staff and students differently by restructuring our own time and really make an impact." An administrator also pointed out that a reform bill "can be powerful because it empowers parents, but [real] change doesn't come from mandates."

The **teachers** urged smaller classes, fewer kids in each classroom and peer coaching to help overcome barriers. They noted that **teachers** need to educate the community, parents and business about active learning and "share with one another" more than they do. For example, high school and elementary teachers should get together to change expectations. In addition, **parents** need to be more involved and the **community** needs to "demand" active learning. It was suggested that an "independent learning center" be set up where parents tutor kids. They noted that "there are **parents** willing to help, but they have to have training." **Business** can help by "offering opportunities to kids like scholarships and jobs upon graduation." There was concern expressed that **business** may "want to control and focus on training instead of education" and that "partnerships can go too far." It was pointed out that the two systems "have to understand one another" and that some parents and business people on school improvement teams don't understand how public education functions.

The **Native Americans** said that values must be a part of active learning. To overcome barriers, education needs to implement the proper sequence of courses, develop good teachers, give parents practical "moccasins" on how to deal with schools, engage families to get kids engaged in the education process and educate and make teachers more aware of contemporary Indians.

"You have to have the freedom to make mistakes" to overcome barriers, noted a **small town/rural** participant. "You have to provide teachers with the right atmosphere for them to take risks and make mistakes." Public schools need "more flexible time and decision making at the lowest level." The participants felt they needed to become more politically active, attend school board meetings, find out what's going on in the schools and get involved. **Business** and **chambers of commerce** need to "plug into the schools as a resource." **State legislators** need to listen more to people outside of metropolitan communities and **legislatures** need to provide more money for education.

Students said that encouragement to overcome barriers to active learning starts with **teachers** and **administrators**. "If the teachers won't take the initiative then the **students** must push . . . but it would take a big group of motivated students . . . how would students in high school even know where to begin?" They observed that "**parents** can encourage active learning, but they don't . . . they're not involved . . . they send their kids to private schools rather than change the public schools." Suggestions to overcome barriers included: start motivating teachers at the kindergarten level, empower teachers by giving them more independence, change the teaching of teachers and emphasize the need to care, implement performance raises and start teacher's pay at $80,000, initiate classes for teachers and administrators on culture and community, increase funds for programs, bring business people to the classroom to lecture on real-world situations and provide greater motivation for 13- and 14-year-olds. Magnet schools were considered a "good start" by the students. Finally, they emphasized that education must be made more valuable by giving

teachers more prestige and higher salaries and by impressing on adolescents the "value of learning."

The **state legislators** suggested that to help overcome barriers to active learning, they need to become "better educated about education, less parochial, more statesman-like in approaching education, more sympathetic and less trivial." They argued that **legislators** ought not to get involved too much in the daily activities of education, but that schools could involve them more as guest lecturers or in teaching specific classes. They agreed that **legislators** need to "learn by doing" and ought to visit the public schools more. It also was noted that the legislature often mixes up education and politics. As policy makers, they need to be able to evaluate the information they get in the media, statistical data and state financial aid to schools. They need to be able "to tell constituents what they are getting for their money." The **legislators** lamented that they get "biased information from teachers," but little information from administrators. The information they get from the teachers' and administrators' organizations and legislative councils is not coalesced. They suggested that "coalition building" needs to take place among educators.

Basically, to remove barriers, **legislators** said they need specific information on what works -- "Tell me what laws stand in the way!" They need "non-biased, research-based information" and less philosophical or ideological advice. They also need to know "what the universities are saying and doing." To help overcome barriers, they suggested that schools need to start in preschool helping parents and that they need to find that special kind of teacher to help restructure the curriculum and determine what measurements are going to be used for creative thinking.

In discussing how to overcome barriers to active learning, the **gubernatorial, legislative and education organization staff** asked: Does the state have a responsibility to make sure things are happening in the schools and does it have to require minimums? It was agreed that the political reality is that the state does have to set minimum competencies but that some freedom can be allowed for meeting them. The staff participants agreed with other participants that there has to be "tolerance to let risks happen."

The **parents** said they need to get more parents committed to "really wanting school reform and be willing to work for it" and become "bigger role models in education." They need to be on top of what kids are doing because "parents can catch kids' problems fastest." It's important that parents "make sure kids are free to discuss or negotiate together in learning." It was suggested that a mediator be found for "parents who don't know how to get change in schooling for their kids." The parents saw a real need for both mediation and negotiation skills in education. They felt that teachers ought to be given time and employee benefits for needed parent/teacher conferences. The responsibility of schools to teach a student "when he or she is ready to be taught" also was stressed by the parents. However, the parents disagreed about the value of too much emphasis on grades. Some parents argued that grades ought to be de-emphasized because it's "bad to give an F to someone who has mastered 65% of the material. That's not failure . . . A 3.5 GPA doesn't mean you know the material." On the other hand, another parent pointed out that there are some problems with de-emphasizing grades given current societal values. "Businesses will want to know what a potential employee's grades are . . . and hopefully, grades promote effort."

The **media** participants pointed out that the education bureaucracy is protective of what is going on in schools and, as a consequence, often "breeds overly protective, conservative schools." However, they pointed out that the "walls are beginning to come down . . . Businesses are getting involved in the schools by loaning executives to some of the schools."

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

When the focus group participants were asked who could cause them to get more involved in school reform and encourage more active learning in the classroom, participants in each of the focus groups responded unanimously -- "The students!" As one **small town/rural teacher** said, "Students are the ones who inspire me as a teacher." A **staff** participant commented -- "Students or kids are the ones who push the emotional buttons."

When asked to name one thing he would change, a **teacher** said he would like to have a "group of students who cared about learning history." And another commented that she would like to have "20 kids who come to class without having to go home to personal problems." A **school board member** said that "an attitude that all kids can learn must permeate the system." **Staff** participants wanted to "focus on what is learned rather than time spent on a subject" and assure that an education outcome is giving "each student self-confidence in his or her capabilities." **Parents** wanted more "individualized education" and "more one-on-one experiences." **State legislators** wanted the kind of education for their children that would be both challenging and enjoyable. They also wanted teachers to have enough flexibility to deal with "my" child, reasonable class sizes, an atmosphere where all students are treated with respect, parents involved in the local school and good pay for teachers.

GENERAL FINDINGS

In addition to the findings described above for each topic, three important perspectives permeated the discussions:

1. Almost every group felt somewhat isolated, left out of the "education" loop and even excluded.

2. Each group felt a certain sense of "powerlessness." The problems seemed bigger than they could address. Most expressed the attitude that "we know we should be doing more, but this is what **they** ought to be doing."

3. The groups did not clearly see how their possible actions fit together with those of others; the problems seemed too big to deal with.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus group led to three major conclusions:

1. The perceptions reinforced the importance of Re:Learning as a broad and comprehensive strategy that brings together multiple activities, people and views to fundamentally change the education system. There is broad agreement that schools need to be changed, but people realize neither they nor any other group or individual can do it alone. A strategy that requires people to come together around a common goal and all play a powerful role within that strategy appears essential for change.

2. The groups' perspectives reinforced how critical extensive and effective communications are. Terms and concepts are often interpreted very differently and much interaction is required to bring groups to a common understanding of ideas.

3. We found the process of using focus groups very valuable. It accomplished well our primary purpose of helping understand the views of a range of groups but it also served as a very effective and nonthreatening way to inform people about Re:Learning.

We strongly recommend that each state involved in or becoming involved in Re:Learning convene its own series of focus groups. The groups may be differently defined in each state. For example, a state may wish to have three groups defined as rural, urban and suburban. Some states are finding that people of different religious and political persuasions view the effort very differently. It would be valuable to convene groups that differ in these regards. Appendix B provides information on the format of the focus groups which could be adapted for use in a given state. Another point to bear in mind when selecting a person to set up the focus groups is that it is necessary to have a person who is well known and regarded in the state to be able to convince people that this is a worthwhile activity in which to engage.

APPENDIX A

WHAT IS RE:LEARNING?

Re:Learning is a major national effort to answer the call for redesigning the total school system. It is grounded in the belief that school redesign efforts must focus on the primary purpose of schooling — to help all students learn to use their minds well — and must include the total education system from schoolhouse to statehouse.

Re:Learning deliberately does not have finished models of the perfect redesigned system. Those must evolve from the hard work of committed students, teachers, administrators, policy makers and community members. Re:Learning seeks to stimulate and support redesign work at the school, district, state and national levels.

Re:Learning unites the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) with the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to work with people in all parts of the education system to make this vision a reality. Re:Learning schools join the Coalition. The states and districts in which they are located agree to work with ECS on redefining policies and procedures to stimulate and support the schools' efforts.

A Re:Learning school agrees to work at the difficult task of adapting a set of nine common principles to its own unique situation. The principles were developed out of a five-year study of American high schools led by Theodore R. Sizer, Coalition chairman. (A full explanation of the principles can be found in the Coalition prospectus.) The experiences of some 50 Coalition schools over the last four years support the value of these principles as a framework for local school redesign.

The principles emphasize the student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach; simple but powerful student goals; personalization of instruction; teachers and principals determining pedagogy; and students demonstrating mastery through meaningful performance.

Re:Learning schools join Coalition schools in working to put these principles into practice. The school faculty must chose to participate as a Re:Learning school. Faculty members are then given time for extensive study, planning and visits to other schools, all in support of their work to redesign the school.

Each participating state has an in-state school coordinator who is trained and supported by the Coalition to assist Re:Learning schools and serve as a "critical friend." The coordinator organizes workshops, brings teachers from different disciplines together, troubleshoots with district and state officials and represents the group to the public.

District and state leaders in a Re:Learning state work on changes in administration and policy that respond to and support the work of the schools.

Some of the policy areas that might need to be changed include school and student assessment, teacher certification, resource allocation, management, leadership, graduation requirements and support systems for teachers and schools.

Re:Learning does not propose model policies for states. Just as the school principles must be worked out at each school to take full advantage of its unique characteristics, so, too, a

state's education policy must be worked out by those responsible in each state. In working toward redesigned policy and administrative practice, state and district leaders use principles that emphasize building a new vision and organizing the education system to incorporate instruction with a clear priority on learning, creating new working relationships, promoting continual learning, coherence, meaning and attention to the impact of change on the people involved.

In Re:Learning states, a cadre of highly respected people from all parts of the education system initiate the building of a shared vision of education. They help guide the systemic administrative and policy changes this vision implies. The cadre helps design a policy environment that reflects the changes in Coalition schools as well as reform efforts throughout the state education system. ECS provides assistance to the cadre.

A steering committee of state leaders focuses on actual policy changes and communications with the general public. This committee, again working with ECS, includes the governor, chief state school officer (CSSO), legislators, business and other leaders who work to promote policy changes developed by the cadre and to enlist the public support necessary for fundamental changes in the state's education system.

Participating states make a five-year commitment to Re:Learning. They agree to assure financial support for fundamental redesign of approximately 10 secondary schools following the Coalition's common principles. A typical amount for each school would be $50,000 per year. A substantial part of the funds would be new or reallocated public dollars from the state and/or district. A portion could be raised from businesses or other private sources.

States also agree to hire an in-state school coordinator to assist the schools and connect with the Coalition and ECS. In addition, states establish a documentation and communication approach to determine adjustments that need to be made in the state's strategy.

The national component of Re:Learning supports the state-by-state and school-by-school changes. The national discussion on education purposes and reform has a major impact on the extent and quality of school redesign. Re:Learning participants contribute to the depth and quality of that discourse.

A national study of Re:Learning is planned. Accountability to the public at the school, state and national levels is vital.

The Coalition of Essential Schools, based at Brown University, is a school-based effort that advocates schools becoming places that better help students use their minds well. The National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools sponsor the Coalition.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve education. Forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members.

Six states — Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island — joined Re:Learning. Others are joining as the effort continues.

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROCESS AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

This appendix contains the anticipated outcomes of each segment of the focus group sessions and the facilitation's general script in the session. Each session was one hour long and required a skilled facilitator to keep the discussion on track. Each facilitator modified the script as appropriate in the group.

The focus group sessions were video taped so that a 10 minute tape could be produced to provide people in Re:Learning a sense of the main perspectives of the groups. The participants sat around a table. A recorder used a flip chart to capture major points of the discussion.

Anticipated Outcomes and Suggested Script

After the participants introduce themselves for the camera, the facilitator will explain that we need their help in better communicating concepts surrounding education reform. **(time limit -- 5 minutes)**

♦♦♦

OUTCOME 1:

We need to learn how different groups of people react to specific words and phrases used by the Re:Learning effort and if these words and phrases are effective in a positive way or have negative connotations.

ACTIVITY: (Time limit: 10 minutes)

Ask each participant to privately write down on a sheet of paper what their first reaction is to each of the following phrases or terms. Each of these phrases will be printed on a big card that you will hold up one after another, giving the participants time to respond to one before going on to the next.

- Student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach
- So students can learn to use their minds well
- At-risk youth
- System change
- Shared responsibility in learning
- Re:Learning

Take each phrase or term one at a time and go around the table. Ask each participant to share one or two things he/she wrote down as his/her first reaction to the phrases listed above.

ACTIVITY: (time limit: 5 minutes)

Explain to the participants that these phrases and terms relate to an ECS effort aimed at improving how students learn in our schools. To help them understand this effort, ask them to pair off and come up with one or two school activities that actively engage students in learning.

Give them 2 minutes. Then ask each participant to share one or two activities with the other participants. **Quickly** move around the table.

Explain that this is the type of learning that the ECS Re:Learning effort advocates.

♦♦♦

OUTCOME 2:

We need to learn and better understand how different groups of people perceive effective education.

ACTIVITY: (time limit: 5 minutes)

Have the participants discuss the following questions:

- Do you believe it is important to have this kind of active, engaged learning taking place in our schools.? If yes, why? If no, why?
- Do you believe that **all** students would benefit from this kind of learning activity?
- Do you believe there is **enough** of this kind of learning taking place in our schools? Why?

♦♦♦

OUTCOME 3:

We need to learn what language or words the participants would use to describe effective education reform as advocated by the Re:Learning effort.

ACTIVITY: (time limit: 10 minutes)

Have the participants discuss the following question:

- If you were enrolling your child in a new school, how would you describe what you wanted for your child in order for him/her to have a good educational experience?

♦♦♦

OUTCOME 4:

We need to learn what and who is "getting in the way" of improving the education system.

ACTIVITY: (time limit: 10 minutes)

Share with the participants that the kind of learning discussed in the previous activity only occurs **7-10%** of the time in our schools.

Have the participants discuss the following questions:

- Why **doesn't** more of this kind of learning take place in our schools?
- What prevents a teacher from initiating more of this kind of learning?
- What could each of the participants do to cause more of this kind of learning to take place in the schools?
- What should "other" people do to cause more of this kind of learning to take place in the schools?

♦♦♦

OUTCOME 5:

We need to learn who or "what kind of messenger" could cause the participants to want to be a part of education reform and **demand** that their kids get "this kind" of education.

ACTIVITY: (time limit: 10 minutes)

Have the participants discuss the following questions:

- **Who** could make you want to be involved?
- **What** could someone say to make you want to be involved?
- Who do **you** listen to?
- What is the **key** message that person should deliver?

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The 13 focus groups consisted of people from each of the following special interests (listed in order of time convened):

A. Business
B. Hispanic
C. African American
D. School board members
E. School administrators
F. Teachers
G. Native Americans
H. Small town and rural citizens
I. Students
J. State legislators
K. Gubernatorial/legislative/education reorganization staff
L. Parents
M. Media

The participants are listed alphabetically. The letter in parenthesis following the name indicates in which of the above groups the person participated.

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